

FEAR AND LEARNING IN A NUCLEAR CRISIS:
A Psychological Study of the Resolution and Implications
of the Cuban Missile Crisis

by
James G. Blight
Center for Science and International Affairs
Harvard University

March, 1987

He who is educated by dread is educated by possibility...when such a person, therefore, goes out from the school of possibility, and knows...that terror, perdition and annihilation dwell next door to every man, and has learned the profitable lesson that every dread which alarms may the next instant become a fact, he will then interpret reality differently.

Søren Kierkegaard, The Concept of Dread, 1844

(ignoring JFK ultimatum, or his refusal to back down!)
Explorations (JFK's) restraint, "stop," returns to avoid war
19, 22, 24, 32 43, 44, 48, 62 : 153 129 (130) (133) 135 (189)

K's fear: 262

Nuclear "insinuation":

thorough US F.U.? 30
(NATO)

explosively described: 34

Alleged N.F.U. committed: "Our war must never be fought"
70-78

Dilemmas, say, 1973:

167

U

Fear of what we war is not me.
fear of other irrational, or one's own -
nor of war of control. ("Reserve, ~~enthusiasm~~ based from
reflecting upon, wanting (not me.
"ever") is enough. ~~Leadership~~ may be
-80-

is not an exaggeration to speak of the nuclear revolution... ^{unilaterally,}
[because] the side that is ahead is no more protected than the ^{Anxiety of}
side that is behind."⁸ Leaders of the superpowers know ^{D-L.}
already, and in a nuclear crisis will (and have) come to know in ^{or of kind}
a profoundly visceral way that they cannot defend themselves or ^{but, D-2}
their citizens from nuclear catastrophe. Under normal
circumstances, this is not necessarily an item of breathless
concern, primarily because of the nearly ubiquitous faith that
leaders are rational and that they will not, therefore, initiate
a process leading to national suicide by launching off into a
nuclear war. But as fear of inadvertence begins to rear its
enigmatical head, and as leaders begin to believe that
rationality alone may not prevent nuclear war, the fact of
vulnerability to holocaust takes on newly sinister meaning.

Second, there is the related fear of the momentum of the
crisis itself - fear that in some darkly mysterious way, the
crisis will cause one or more of the central actors to
de-emphasize, or even momentarily to forget about their
vulnerability and thus to initiate a nuclear war. Schelling
believes that these worries can lead to great danger. "Nothing
is more dangerous to either side in a nuclear confrontation," he
writes, "than the anxiety on the other side, the reciprocated
anxiety about the breakdown of confidence in the ability to keep
the crisis from exploding into war."⁹ Schelling has long
believed that some such process of mutually escalating anxiety
in a nuclear crisis greatly increases the risk of a preemptive

NO " "
(D-2)

see Treya Wilber on ascension of control
control over career - or fear of loss
of control - cf. 2nd feeling of (survivor)
guilt - rather than fear, "catastrophe
is unforeseeable, unpredictable..."

(and see "The love of justice" - people
would rather blam the with the
believe life is meaningless.

Pardon, rather die a violent death (Bach)
to assume a meaningful life at death.

faced. Beginning on October 16 from, as McGeorge Bundy has said, a "standing start" the men in the EXCOMM underwent a rapid and tumultuous barrage of unexpected and deeply troubling events and fears of even worse occurrences. That they have been unable satisfactorily to integrate their evolving psychological reality into a plausible account of the crisis is no surprise. But what is more than a little surprising, I think, is that in a matter of a few days these men - and Khrushchev certainly must be included in this category - were able to respond so creatively and adaptively* to a set of fears they never expected to have and which, I think it is quite clear, they still do not fully understand. They had the wisdom and courage to forsake their preconceived ideas about how to manage a nuclear crisis in practice, even though their various retrospective theories about the effects of those actions remain pretty unconvincing, simply because they omit the very core of the psychological reality they faced: Fear of inadvertent nuclear war. And it was (and is) vastly more important for the peace of the world that these men in fact "had the experience," to re-invoke yet again George Ball's favorite passage from Eliot, than that they may have "missed the meaning." The meaning is for all of us to puzzle out.

But while it is true that the analogy between scientific crises and a nuclear crisis may shed some light on the cognitive side of evolving psychological life during the missile crisis, it does not, I think, even begin to allow us to appreciate the

(in Castro
on JFK
courage
is absent)

* They look good only because K was "creative and adaptive" (if you didn't hate him (DE!!): We had to back down." But for him to lose, we wait under a ult.; we don't want to winner "did not even

See Gilpatric to me on plan (no need to charge them, fight JCS, in advance).

Suppose, ult. without (costs) U-2 shot down.
What would K do then?
What did RFK expect?

(He didn't admit Rust story; but I know how close they were to giving up missiles. Would it have been like JFK "blow" or not butts in front troops at VN? (RFK 67)

New Pres feels challenged to try the next move of the ladder (JCS options list) before accepting shameful compromise.

Like, today: need to use arms, before compromising;
or, with Nixon, invading Haiphong;
or invading all troops (1965-67)

Like Nixon ^{HAK} in 1969, and 1972 (^{I suspect})
(mining Haiphong; one that
on Hanoi?)

Either he could not, even, concede;
or

He had to "fly forward," into threat, before
conceding/compromising [giving up invasion? still a threat??]

plat
view
anti
poli
that
cris
cris
"sta
1962
confi
the i
trans
more,
furth
In th
conne
had t
way t
pract:
We are
are ta
direct

(Note: "is here," Culon/SU had a legal
right to shoot down U-2; US had none,
to 1) blockade 2) destroy missiles (see Turkey!)
3) invade.

meantime Was there a consensus — a common awareness — of
the "foot" (Khrushchev & RFK ult) that US ←
would ("down to") attack on Monday if
missiles were not removed? B moves as if...

plausibly to account for this development, this learning, in my view, without accepting as basic three propositions which are antithetical to the whole tradition of nuclear strategy and policy and of the interpretation of the missile crisis: First, that the missile crisis is not "like" any other international crisis; though it has psychological analogues in other sorts of crises, second, that Robert Kennedy did indeed deliver a ^{NO} "statement of fact" to the Soviets on the evening of October 27, 1962, a statement behind which lay a week of the most profound confusion and fear of inadvertent nuclear war; and third, that the uniqueness and inscrutability of the psychological transformations which occurred during the missile crisis make it more, rather than less, interesting as an object of still further study and learning about how best to avoid nuclear war. In that pivotal crisis, the participants were able somehow to connect their fear with their actions in adaptive ways. They had that experience. But neither they, nor we, have yet found a way to connect them in theory in a way that integrates their practice into our formal thinking about avoiding nuclear war. We are still searching for the meaning. Some preliminary steps are taken in the chapters which follow to articulate the general direction some such search ought to follow.

B argues as if the crisis had been resolved
of JFK's version of K offer ("U Thant off")
on Sunday, after (beach's down from) Sat ult
(and version of K offer, publicizing and presenting)
or instead of making it. ^{27th} and another as
(say, Saturday). He argues the K offer with RFK ult;

^(DENIAL)
^{"stated"}

is "child" a (total) bluff?
Is "that the news worth
to cover" (not total control)
a bluff?
Do not most all "bluffs" have
qualities of above events?
(the mind's eye -
of contact/tapits/pos/
of effect;
of close = oneself;
"loss of control over".

missile crisis and his unequivocal endorsement of crisis management, fear is bad, is maladaptive and can only lead to bad management. In a nuclear crisis, this of course means that increased fear will lead straightaway to an increased likelihood of nuclear holocaust. But because fear is so widely believed to be maladaptive by participants in the missile crisis and analysts alike, anyone arguing for the adaptive importance of fear will appear to be up to his neck in a nonsequiter.

The problem, here as elsewhere in the study of a nuclear crisis, is this: Participants and analysts alike have for various reasons failed to appreciate the vast difference between a rational reconstruction, derived by looking backward at a selected, distorted, perhaps coherent set of mental snapshots of the past on the one hand and, on the other, the uncertain phenomenology of living the event forward without the slightest idea of how it will turn out. What this tilting toward rational reconstruction sums to is the widespread inability, I believe, among all manner of students of the missile crisis, and of so much nuclear policy-making which rests on its interpretation, to believe that fear was thick in the psychological texture of the missile crisis and, even more importantly, that this fear was and remains unprecedented. It was a profound fear, and that fear was only fear of calculated attack, as one characteristically finds at the psychological root of conventional deterrence failures, but was rather fear of inadvertence - of fate, if you will. I believe that if we try

to ult. / b/w
(rather than
"dumb"
or mindless
convention)

so Hause
b) control
visibly "loss of oneself, one's self-control, one's self-possession"
(noise), or "dignities" (Fanon, Denning), one's role/job/control of
one's own life, one's own body, one's own mind, one's own soul,

will by then have been exhausted, confused and frightened by their recursive participation in a mind-game described many years ago by Schelling: "He thinks we think he thinks we think...he thinks we think he'll attack; so he thinks we shall; so he will; so we must."⁸ By some such psychological process as this, leaders will have initiated the nuclear war that, at the outset of the crisis, all sought to avoid unequivocally. *but, along with
the goals
(also
"absolute,
nursing
/ ...")* And at the psychological fountainhead of this process will have been fear, leading to stress and its associated psychopathologies, which will together have been responsible for transforming leaders' beliefs from total opposition to initiating nuclear war to go ahead and authorize nuclear first use, either in a preemptive strike or in some more initially limited escalatory action.

This is the central prognostication and concern of proponents of the rational/irrational actor psychologies which presently circumscribe discussion of nuclear policy. We should note two of its characteristics: First, while nuclear war would be arrived at inadvertently, in the sense that the decision to end the crisis by launching nuclear weapons was not anticipated at the time of entry into the crisis, the object of the fear which drives the hypothesized psychopathologies has nothing to do with inadvertence itself, but is instead simply fear of being attacked. In other words, according to this view, leaders in a nuclear crisis will, in all probability, not learn anything significant as they try to manage it. It will seem to them, as

*(the, with
honor, using
a high rate
-redundant
of "survival"
-which is
or may not
still be
unassimilable
-in which
case,
NOT NEC.
do with inadvertence itself, but is instead simply fear of being attacked
nuclear crisis will, in all probability, not learn anything significant as they try to manage it. It will seem to them, as*

I learned from VN (and from study's

Cuba II later) not from crisis,

(except, & distinct leaders; first, for going in; then, for not / or not)

20 stas. Since
later.

20 stas. Since
later.

mem

beli

robu

larc

in a

trag

circ

some

psyc

nucl

cris

fear

any

non-

the

some

psych

nucle

I

which

ought

does

uniqu

relat

regar

fear

expulsion, loss of role/status/job/honor/
attack/risk, integrate & org/other
disobedience, dishonor,
(betrayal)

esp. fear of failure, defeat, humiliation, =
swapping "fear of one war even if
we strike first"

Choice ~~and~~ ^{Fears}
Choice of ~~from~~ Fear

(Choice of ~~that~~ Evil
or big risk of ~~that~~ Evil -

to avoid ~~that~~ Fear

~~Great~~ Humiliation

" loss (separation

+ loss, mutilation (torture, disfigurements)

(There are separations "worse"
the physical death/annihilation)

suffering worse than sins / murders.

"We have ways of making you...
talk; more the 'talk'!"

our own
ideoth "now"

But of course that would mean outright war with the Soviet Union. It may have been in the course of some such reflection as this that Robert Kennedy began to wonder "what, if any, circumstance or justification gives this government or any government the moral right to bring its people and possibly all people under the shadow of nuclear destruction?"¹⁸

Here we come to the heart of the psychological matter, viewed from a phenomenological perspective, from the standpoint of individuals who were groping forward into an unknown and dangerous future: The Crystal Ball Effect. It is here that we may see the deep wisdom of Schelling's neglected insight based on his reading of the events in October, 1962 - that in the missile crisis, the enemy shifted from the nuclear adversary to the nuclear "environment." Feared nuclear inadvertence was in that instance the fear of a process and an outcome that is abhorred by both sides, thus creating a de facto but powerful common enemy against which both sides must unite if they are to keep the nuclear crystal ball from shattering. One psychological result of this process seems to be the turning outward onto the whole environment of potentially dangerous events, rather than a turning inward in defensive avoidance as the psychological domino theory of rational/irrational actors predicts. Instead of becoming less sensitive to the perceptions and needs of the adversary, leaders in October, 1962 seem to have obsessed with how their actions would be perceived by the

JFK: "but not yet. True, while on my tour..."
"Khrushchev, K on last many
(i.e. late July just,
moreover till
(while we
were working
as "Frigid"
letter, he
(+ others) were
drafting
his "last
word"
letter, sent
late July
just his tree:
before leaving of
attack on SAM site, for
and so we will be less of
site. It is 10 last night
and so gets alt.; sends each other
from the front line.

What did Debts think of
rest of Boycott etc? ("O": being)
and if it occurred?

But fear was not necessary to
JFK's ultimatum (unless, it was
for JFK!) - or the two be offend.

It could ("should," according
to Debs), and most "notional actor
analysts") have come from courage,
or from "cold appraisal of
balance of forces." Or as it did: from a
combination of fear and fear-of-failure, stubbornness, pride, etc.
Believe for K, if he was
a "cold notional actor"; but fear
helped, and may (having) have
been necessary.

i.e. bureaucratized,
giving "normal
moderateness"

(JFK allowed "normal workers"
to antagonize his ~~opposition~~
some from + others
on last night - therefore won.

What makes K become toughing & probabilistic
to debtors (it is not, for Debs!)

- is 1) John ^{unwilling} _{McG B, McN (Ball?) (and?)} toughing is effective sympathy: MAD.
- 2) His "toughness" till then. ("admirable, normal" ^{but} _{Cold War})
- 3) John didn't back down - despite this fact; he won't a command; why did he?
- 4) John toughing is SUVIC control (of S.A.M.s, and condition
AA (?) + missiles; so why the need (he had 43 hours; could
have "used" all day Sunday...).
(Why did he surrender so soon? - chicken)

— Does B think it inevitable, certain, that
K will back down? see 235

— Does he tell RFK's ult. add nothing

— to the proviso that US would strike

(by Monday!) if K did not desist the strikes?

("status of fact": i.e. that did not change situation, US proviso
and warning and complaint expression of it combined it for

(was airstrike planned for late Monday
(48 hours) — why — or for first light
Tuesday?

When operational?

Otherwise, he should recognize (not "deserve")
that JFK's initial response to war was
to sacrifice constitutional principle of US strike (= war)
if K did not move within 24-48 hours
(which JFK did not, much, threaten!)

RFK did not say: "We can (probably) not
hold back USCS more than 48 hours, although
we will try ~~to~~ on hardest."

Nor did he believe (what he said) that
there could not be a deal along the lines of
a public truce.

(Why is ref. to a conf. deleted?!

R seems to think ~~that~~ JFK + K
acted syntactically - both made
(equal) concessions.



Why didn't K answer (so as to
get public trouble, what he'd asked)
with his "Statement of Facts" of what
would follow US air-strike, or invasion?

Why mention "Khrushchev" of after crisis?